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AUTHOR Hansen, Tricia L.
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ABSTRACT

The primary intent of this paper is to provide an ideological critique of one instance of "union talk," which the paper takes to be representative of organized labor discourse at large. To reach this goal, the question of the need for and value of unions is specifically addressed in the paper, and a review of the studies existing within the communication field that specifically address union communicative behavior is provided. The paper then presents an overview of the two general arguments offered as explanations of the current decline of union membership and of union bargaining power and suggests implications which invite future research. The paper concludes with an ideological critique of a formal speech which represents the contemporary argument among many labor activists that the traditional model of "servicing unionism" needs to be changed to a model of "organizing unionism." (Contains 46 references.) (Author/RS)

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THE IDEOLOGY OF THE "ORGANIZING MODEL OF UNIONISM": PRELIMINARY UNDERSTANDINGS

by

Tricia L. Hansen
Purdue University

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ABSTRACT

The primary intent in undertaking this essay is to provide an ideological critique of one instance of "union talk," which the author takes to be representative of organized labor discourse at large. To reach this goal, the question of the need for and value of unions is specifically addressed, and a review of the studies existing within the communication field that specifically address union communicative behavior is provided. This is followed with an overview of the two general arguments offered as explanations of the current decline of union membership and of union bargaining power. The essay concludes with an ideological critique of a formal speech which represents the contemporary argument among many labor activists that the traditional model of "servicing unionism" needs changed to a model of "organizing unionism."

"THE IDEOLOGY OF THE 'ORGANIZING MODEL OF UNIONISM':

PRELIMINARY UNDERSTANDINGS"

It appears that when it comes to the idea of "unions" and "organized labor," that almost everyone has a reason to say "no" and no one has a reason to say "yes". Drawing from my own informal social, political, and economical experiences, I do not hesitate to argue that the sentiment currently is wide spread.

As a scholar of organizational communication, I am intrigued by the question as to why so many individuals so readily appear to say "no" to organized labor. Even many of those that are union members seem less than enthusiastic about their membership. A number of potential explanations may be articulated. Maybe employers no longer exploit their employees, consciously or unconsciously, in the name of "making profit margins." It could be that no one works in unsafe and unhealthy conditions given that the mandates set by OSHA, are carefully adhered to. Perhaps everybody now is paid a wage/salary that is a direct reflection of their net worth to their company, and therefore every U.S. citizen now earns enough to be able to attain the "American standard of living". It may be that having to work illegal overtime is not a factor anymore. And then, it could be that we have finally reached a point where the courts grant <u>equal</u> representation to the individual employee as well as to the employer. I argue that the above explanations fall short of accepting the legitimacy of saying "no" to organized labor, and I call for questions that explore this phenomenon more deeply.

My primary intent in undertaking this essay is to provide an ideological critique of one instance of "union talk," which I take to be representative of organized labor discourse at large. To reach this goal, I first address more specifically the question of the need for and value of unions. As a concerned organizational scholar, I argue that those in the field of communication, specifically organizational communication scholars, have neglected an important and legitimate part of organizational study, and I provide a review of the studies existing within the communication field that specifically address union communicative behavior. I follow this with an overview of the two general arguments offered as explanations of the current decline of union membership and of union bargaining power: the first a structural explanation and the second one rooted in the phenomenon of "business unionism," as influenced by the idea of unions as "servicing

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organizations". I conclude by providing an ideological critique of a speech which represents the contemporary argument among many labor activists that the traditional model of "servicing unionism" needs changed to a model of "organizing unionism." This model is thought to bring with its adoption the potential to overcome current labor problems. The critique I provide of the speech is a preliminary attempt to provide an ideological understanding as to why, in 1992, union membership and bargaining power, in general, continue to decline, even though the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) Organizing Department endorsed the organizing model of unionism as early as 1988.

Need for and Value of Unions

How do we then, accept claims such as the idea that unions have served their purpose and are no longer needed? We may accept that unions are too militant to be useful anymore. In large part, however, they are not. Almost all contemporary union activity is of a non-violent nature.[1] We might argue that unions make unreasonable economic demands on their employers. In general they do not do this either. They cannot even act and hope to make any financial gains unless they have first determined the employer's "ability to pay."[2] Our explanation may lie in the fact that there is a steadily increasing middle class who we may assume are content with their lot in life. In contradiction to this, recent statistics show us that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. The middle class is disappearing while the lower class is growing at an alarming rate. (Nasar, 1992) It seems safe to say that claiming membership in the lower class is **not** the American Dream. On the other hand, it could be that the working class itself is disappearing. The shift in the economy from a "manufacturing industry" to a "service industry" may be doing away with the working class, as well as making it unneeded and impossible to organize labor. Again we know that this is not true. Kim Moody (1988) argues that service workers are no less "workers" than those employed in the manufacturing industry. Moody claims "the changes that have occurred within the developed capitalist economies have not altered the fundamental condition of labor which must still sell its capacity to work to an employer and must still work as part of a collective effort organized by capital largely on the terms set by capital" (1988, p. xix). In essence, labor still struggles to have its voice heard and to represent itself. The labor force still has nothing to "sell" except its power to labor; the ones buying the labor are still those in power over

the powerless.

Regardless of the above dialogue, a few more explanations for saying "no" can be addressed. It may be that the reason to say "no" stems from the fact that unemployment rates are relatively low and kept constant. We might accept that rates are **really** low when compared to the peaks occurring over the last six decades. Upon checking the "facts" behind the "facts" we find, however, that the unemployment rate may be low, but that does not address what it means to be employed today. Many persons now work at jobs that are considered temporary yet entail full-time duties (i.e. permanent employment with organizations supplying "temp" workers to companies in need). One can work for 40 hours a week yet receive no benefits package, especially in organizations employing few people. Many people are working for wages that place them far below income levels that meet the cost of living. More and more persons in our growing work force **are** employed, and the employment mostly **is** in the "service" sector. But these jobs largely are **not** well-paid managerial positions. They consist of flipping hamburgers, doing laundry, entering data, and answering telephones, etc. (Garson, 1988). Moody (1988) argues that the proportion of the population dependent on wage labor is increasing. I argue that **wage labor** tends to involve to people who are trying to earn a living on wages set close to $4.45 an hour, on $9968.00 a year, before taxes.

The need for organized labor and the material conditions conducive to organized labor still exist, but people still are saying "no," and union membership and bargaining power continue to decline (Miller & Tilly, 1992; Moody, 1988). In 1955, 33.2% of the labor force was organized, while in 1990 only 16.1% of the labor force was organized (World Almanac and Book of Facts, 1991). Current estimates claim that only about 13 to 14% of the U.S. labor force is organized. (Cormier, 1992) The continued decline demands some answers.

Communication Inquiry and Unions

The field of communication largely has neglected the study of union discourse, even though organizational communication scholars are specifically well-suited to conducting study in this area. Knapp and McCroskey challenge the field of organizational communication as early as 1968, arguing that the focus of research has been management-oriented, and that the lack of information concerning labor organizations and their members "is readily apparent" (p. 161). Botan and Frey (1983) claim organized labor is a significant

organizational form which cuts across all major forms of organizational contexts. Given this, they write that it is surprising that organized labor "has been virtually ignored within the relevant research" (p. 233; see also Botan, 1990; Brock, Botan & Frey, 1985). Despite these admonitions, neither the field of communication in general, nor the area of organizational communication in particular, have invested much effort in study of labor unions.

Charles Redding (1992) argues that this is "the strange case of the missing organization." It is almost inconceivable that communication scholars have chosen to neglect intense study of unions. How can we rationalize a "missing organization" when in 1990 the American labor force numbered 103,905,000; 16.1% or 16,740,000 of which held union memberships (World Almanac and Book of Facts, 1991). That is a significant organizational form. I argue that the neglect is even more inconceivable in light of the fact that the membership and the power of unions have been steadily decreasing since 1955. Because organized labor is a legitimate form for organizational communication study, and because the question of declining memebrship is an intriguing one, I heartily endorse the recent attempt to direct the attention of communication scholars toward the study of organized labor. At the October 1992 Speech Communication Association Convention in Chicago, a special topics seminar, "Labor Discourse & American Society: Strategies of Conflict, Strategies of Cooperation" was held to begin addressing the research deficit.

Review of relevant research

To have a clearer picture of where research efforts are needed, it is important to understand the labor research that has been conducted in the field of communication. Knapp and McCroskey (1968) argue that research relevant to the communicative activities of organized labor may be classified into four general categories: "training programs," "labor-management interaction," "surveys of communication needs," and "field studies of intra-union communication." Botan and Frey (1983) endorse Knapp and McCroskey's categories, but argue that "surveys of communication needs" really are a "form of intra-union communication" (p. 235). The former authors survey all labor research they determine relevant to their research questions. I purposely have limited my review of relevant literature to studies published or presented within contexts specific to the field of communication. I do this with the purpose of revealing just what studies have been accepted within

the field. Setting these limitations, however, provides me with a review differing from that offered by both Knapp and McCroskey (1968) and Botan and Frey (1983).

In organizing a classification of the research reviewed here, I find two of Knapp and McCroskey's categories useful **intra-union communication** and **labor-management interaction**. I have identified two further categories representing research extending beyond the interests in intra-union communication and labor-management interaction. The two categories I posit are **media interaction** and **labor as future social movement**.

Intra-Union Communication

Investigations of intra-union communication have far surpassed studies of union communication in any other capacity. This category can be divided into two further parts: research within the union local and research within the union national.

Union local

Dee (1958) provides an early content analysis of written communication, representative of formal channels of communication, within a local chapter of the United Steelworkers of America. Slaughter (1959) addresses the relationship between local grievance committeemen [sic] and rank-and-file members. Dee (1960) extends his earlier analysis of formal channels of communication to include oral dimensions. In 1962, Tompkins posits a "semantic/information distance" between union officers and rank-and-file members specific to a local union under his study. Dee (1962) further examines channels of talk in a local union, focusing on the regular meeting and the union steward as two separate "channels." Thirty years later, Sefcovic (1992) adopts an ethnographic approach by which to understand the rhetoric within a tiny local chapter of union members at the University of Georgia, as they struggle to organize and maintain organization.

Union National

Studies of communicative activity at the national level of unions begin with Dee's (1968) assessment of the communication needs of any actively participating union member. These needs are determined by the type or types of audiences the member has to address. Jensen and Jensen (1977) seek to understand the "union rhetoric" of the 1972 election of international officers within the United Mine Workers. The authors argue that "the past [of the labor movement] can be used to control the present" (p. 173). Carter (1980) also seeks

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to understand the rhetoric of a national union organization. He provides an analysis of the ideological manifestations in the Industrial Workers of the World's rhetorical use of song. Botan (1983) provides a quantitative analysis addressing the question of whether union members trust the messages they receive from their union. Daley (1992) examines the charismatic leadership of John L. Lewis, founder of the United Mine Workers (UMW), arguing Lewis' leadership was integral to the success of UMW activism. Pennington (1992) also focuses on leadership, identifying emergent strategies of leadership used successfully by two female African-American activists of the AFL-CIO. Pribble (1992) introduces the communication field to the internal rhetoric of the United Auto Workers of America (UAW) as they have successfully launched sit-down strikes against General Motors. Pribble provides an analysis of the communication strategies and narratives used by UAW rhetors during the strike. Stewart (1992) offers an analysis of national union communication. He provides a rhetorical analysis of the interaction between The Knights of Labor and the AFL. Stewart draws from Kenneth Burke's ideas and argues that the rhetoric between "The Knights" and the AFL is one "rotten with perfection" (p. 1).

Labor-Management Interaction

The second area of communication studies of organized labor focuses upon labor-management interaction. Starr (1953) suggests a number of problems within labor-management relations largely due, he argues, to propagandistic efforts on the part of management, efforts aimed at destroying unionism. In 1965, Keltner examined the conflict inherent in the negotiation and bargaining processes between management and unions. Keltner provides an analysis of collective bargaining as a decision-making process, exploring the roles and functions of those involved in the mediation process. Putnam typifies union and management negotiations as the tradition areana for collective bargaining activities. Putnam and Jones (1982) provide an analysis of bargaining interaction, of which collective bargaining is a central activity. Donohue, Diez, and Hamilton (1984) provide ideas for coding labor--management negotiation. Brock, Botan, and Frey (1985) examine labor-management interaction from a new angle, seeking to understand the process through which management utilizes institutionalized techniques to "bust" unions. Conrad (1992) examines two issues directly dealing with labor-management interaction--"proposals to ban permanent replacement of striking workers and a series of legislative actions taken in response to the 1989 strike against Eastern Airlines and its subsequent proceedings" (p. 1).

Conrad argues that labor-management discourse perpetuates "an illusion that the interests of labor, management, and owners coincide" (p. 25).

Media Interaction

I only have identified two studies giving specific focus to the interaction between the media and unions. However, studies such as these hold significant implications in light of the controversy over the power of the media to influence society. Douglas (1986) examines the potential for the mass media both to enable and severely to constrain the labor movement. Williams (1992) focuses on newspapers and argues that "newspaper reportage and writing about the labor movement is an ideological act," an act that depicts the labor movement as lifeless.

Labor as Future Social Movement

Studies in the category of labor as future social movement are ones that focus on the future of society as a society of labor. These studies highlight the implications for future labor movement in light of the implications stemming from past, present, and projected future societal contexts. Stewart (1977) provides a review of American labor agitation from 1865 to 1915. He argues that labor went through an identity crisis, largely due to its own hypocritical rhetoric. He urges present and future labor movements to proceed with caution. Jensen (1977) focuses on the potential for the adaptation and renewal of the labor movement. He calls for a new type of labor leader, one who can successfully work within yet against bureaucratic constraints.

The four final studies falling into this category were all part of the recent SCA special topics seminar. Artz (1992) addresses the problem of the marginalization of labor's voice, arguing that it will not be heard unless we create a new political party--"a party which speaks for the working American" (p. 20). Cox (1992) examines the resistance of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union Local 4-620 to the BASF lockout. He gives specific focus to the discourse giving rise to and gaining power from the cooperative efforts between union workers and the wider community. Gregg (1992) discusses the potential problems confronting workers organizing in a postmodern world. Trasciatti (1992) provides a rhetorical analysis of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's famous speech known as "The Truth About the Paterson Strike." Trasciatti argues that rhetoric such as that

used by Flynn will "help to affect a necessary change in the public's perception of labor unions and their role in American society" (p. 14).

Explanations for Union Decline

Apart from research within the field of communication, two general claims have been made in attempting to explain the decline in union membership and bargaining power. The first is that the decline is a structural phenomenon. Those adhering to this claim argue that as the U.S. manufacturing base continues to decrease as a result of technological innovation, we inevitably will have lesser need for organized labor, and indeed, have a labor force which by definition cannot be organized. However, if the fundamental condition of labor is the selling of "its capacity to work to an employer...as a part of a collective effort organized by capital largely on the terms set by capital" (Moody, 1988, p. xix), and if this fundamental condition still exists, and it does, the structural argument does not stand up. To sell one's ability to labor and therefore "serve" is no different than to sell one's ability to labor and therefore "manufacture" durable goods.

The second explanation offered is that organized labor, i.e. unions, are as corrupt and as concerned with capital accumulation as are capitalist employers. This is where we find the potential for explaining why even dues paying members seem to say "no" to unions. Members argue that "labor has sold out"; that union representatives are no more than corrupt capitalists who use union money, position and loyalties, i.e. who use "labor," to accumulate private wealth. This concept generally is known as "business unionism." By definition, business unionism is the tendency for union leaders to aspire to be bosses and owners themselves, and to value capital accumulation so much that they easily adopt business strategies designed to aid capital accumulation at the expense of labor. Business unionism is "private careerism" among union leaders. It is process through which "individualism" supersedes leaders' commitment to union members. The end result of business unionism is that "membership rights [suffer] when they [come] into conflict with private careers" (Green, 1980, p. 40).

Business unionism has long historical roots. Two significant union leaders, famous for their activism but also for their business unionism orientations, are Samuel Gompers and Jim Mitchell. Gompers served as the president of the AFL in 1886. Mitchell served the as the president of the United Mine Workers in the early 1900's. Both leaders figure prominently in the history of the labor movement, their influence having far-

reaching consequences. Green (1980) identifies Mitchell as "the leading business unionist of his era" (p. 54). Leadership such as that provided by Gompers and Mitchell set the stage for a tradition of "business unionism."

An integral influence within the tradition of business unionism has been the conceptual development of unions as "servicing organizations." To understand unions as servicing organizations is to understand them as business organizations whose purpose is to **serve** a semi-passive membership. The general public, corporate management, and workers understand unions as organizations that **serve** their members (Cormier, 1992; Metzgar, 1991; Numbers that Count, 1988). By definition a union understood as a servicing organization is one whose leaders "try to help people by solving problems **for** them" (Metzgar, 1991, p. vii). Two implications are of profound importance here. The first is that by doing things **for** the members, unions become part of a tripartite system: management, employees, and **the union**. To function effectively, however, and to have power when power is needed, there can only be a two-party system: management and employees/union. Employees **are** the union, but if they do not take ownership of it and understand the union as themselves, any number of problems arise.

These problems are found in the second implication of the servicing model. Capitalism thrives on difference. As a derivative of capitalism, business unionism also thrives on difference. The implication is a complex one, but in essence when workers identify themselves apart from the union and as not integral to and therefore not having a vested interested in it, business unionists can get away with many unethical practices. Business unionists are freed from accountability to their "disinterested" members. They also avoid the surveillance of interested and participating members. This rift between unions and workers also is one that makes employer goals easier to attain. If management can substantiate a conceptual division between the union and the employees, they are in a position to construct the union as the enemy of management-worker relationships, as the trouble-bearing and therefore unwanted third party. Fostering this division allows management successfully to thwart the power that comes with collective action.

In 1988, experts in organized labor posited an answer to the problems manifest in the tradition of business and servicing unionism. What was posited was the "organizing model of unionism." In the spring of 1988, the AFL-CIO's Organizing Department held a two-day national teleconference committed to developing the

potential for the labor movement to revitalize itself. For the first time, labor officials openly admitted and discussed "the prevalence of the often huge gap between local leaders and the 'apathetic lump' of members who see the union as something similar to an insurance claims-adjuster rather than a membership organization" (Metzgar, 1991, p. vii). Participants in the conference agreed that the tradition of the servicing model of unionism was problematic. What they collectively developed during the teleconference is the organizing model of unionism. In this model is the argument for a "model of unionism that involves and empowers 'the membership in actions and decisions that effect them -- whether bargaining for a contract, recruiting new members, settling a grievance, or lobbying on a bill in the legislature'" (Metzgar, 1991, p. vii). The idea that "organizing never stops," that the enthusiasm and drive which is part of any initial efforts to organize workers should be kept alive, is what the organizing model of unionism is all about. In sum, this model of unionism has been offered and endorsed as the means through which worker apathy may be overcome; membership, "ownership" of unions, and participation will increase; business unionism will be controlled, etc. Ideally, the model should lead to all these things. It does not, however, seem to be happening. I want to know why. My question is significant in light of the fact that the organizing model of unionism was officially endorsed in the spring of 1988, but union membership and bargaining power still continue to decrease, while it appears that the "false" conceptual distance between unions and workers continues to widen. I argue that this is a significant area of study for communication scholars to address.

Analysis of the "Organizing Model of Unionism"

A theme that recurs frequently throughout the relevant literature reviewed is the question of the public and political identity of organized labor. No one in the communication field, however, has examined the ideology of union discourse at large. I agree with Trasciatti. Rhetorical messages hold the potential to "help affect a necessary change in the public's perception of labor unions and their role in American society" (p. 14). Rhetoric also holds the potential to bring a needed change in the perceptions of unionism by its own members. I argue that before we can offer suggestions about how union activists should proceed to use rhetoric, we first have to develop an understanding of the ideological constraints manifest in present union discourse. In a sense, offering new rhetorical strategies is "putting the cart before the horse." Perhaps the

labor movement is significantly crippled by contradictions within its present rhetorical strategies. If union discourse is already wrought with contradictions, the contradictions will defeat any new rhetorical strategies offered.

Knapp and McCroskey (1968) argue that results of their research indicate a need to develop "ways of making all levels of union membership aware of the value of effective communication" (p. 167). They suggest a need for motivational research as well as research directed at understanding how "the academic community communicates with the labor community" (p.1 64). Artz (1992) advocates a new discourse which will give rise to a new political party designed to speak for the American worker. Pribble (1992) adds that "[t]o energize the labor movement at the end of the twentieth century, union rhetors need to look at how they address workers, union and non-union. A union discourse which encourages workers to participate in the union and to contribute to our society's on-going discussion of the nature of work will aid in re-invigorating the labor movement" (p. 30). Knapp and McCroskey's, Artz's, and Pribble's arguments are well taken. However, I argue that the potential for effective communication within and without the labor movement begins at a much deeper and less obvious level. Until we provide union rhetors--union rhetors defined here as any individuals endorsing American labor--a perspective by which they may become aware of the ideological constraints within their present discourse, efforts to revitalize the labor movement will be handicapped.

In the following pages, I provide an ideological critique of the speech Robert Muehlenkamp delivered during the 1988 AFL-CIO national teleconference. At the time of the delivery, Muehlenkamp was serving as the Organizing Director of the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Workers. The ideas within his speech are cited in union discourse as the concepts central to the "organizing model of unionism." (Cormier, 1992; Metzgar, 1991; Numbers that Count, 1988) I argue that even though Muehlenkamp's ideas appear at surface level to be the turning point away from a tradition of business and servicing unionism, the fundamental bases upon which business and servicing unionism thrive are still present.

Douglas (1986) provides a framework from which to begin my analysis. She points out that unionism faces a difficult, if not impossible role, in the U.S. capitalist democracy, for the ideals of unionism are ill-fitted to "the dominant American ideology that in spite of an abundance of lip service to equality gives

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highest priority to **individual** achievement, initiative and freedom" (p. 9). Douglas further argues that the resolution of conflict between achievement and equality in the economic sphere has been to favor achievement over equality. Douglas concludes by agreeing with Alan Wolfe's contention "that democracy is no longer defined by equality and Rousseauian standards of individual participation of each citizen in political decision making, but rather by the existence of formal institutions and characteristics such as elections, a constitution, and agreed-upon rules of political discourse" (Douglas, 1986, p. 9).

The labor force originally organized to promote equal and unified representation of the working class. A common motto, still in use today, is "an injury to one, an injury to all," while a typical metaphor in union discourse is "brotherhood." Of the eighty-one active unions in 1992 (World Almanac and Book of Facts, 1991), at least seven have the term "brotherhood" in their chapter name (i.e. "International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers," "United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America"). The metaphor of "brotherhood" immediately invites feminist critique. It has the obvious potential to alienate much of the workforce. It also seems in conflict with the idea of leadership, leadership often held to be the savior of labor's problems (Jensen, 1977; Daley, 1992; Pennington, 1992; Trasciatti, 1992).

As collective action, organized labor stands against individualistic capitalism. Unions urge "unity," the core of the term "union," itself. Unions also stand for democracy, a democracy in which **all** voices are heard, a democracy of individuals and not of institutionalized forms. But given the context in which American organized labor exists, the question is:, "How successful is labor in separating itself from the individualistic, capitalistic, achievement oriented American society? More specifically for my analysis, how successful is Muehlenkamp, in his speech accepted by union activists as representative of the organizing model of unionism, in separating himself from the American capitalist ideology?

Muehlenkamp introduces his speech by relating a short narrative about "Eddie." Muehlenkamp begins: "When we have a demonstration or we have a picketline in our local union and we want the members to come out and we want the members to participate, why is it that Eddie's area in our union has the most participation, even though the buses have to come the farthest?" (p. 1). Muehlenkamp also concludes his speech by returning once again to the question of Eddie's union. (p. 5)

Relating short narratives with which almost all audience members may identify is traditionally accepted as a good rhetorical strategy. In Muehlenkamp's case the narrative he uses appears to hold more detrimental potential than useful potential. His account of Eddie reifies patriarchy and systematically acts to marginalize female union members of his audience.

Muehlenkamp also refers to the general American employer as "he" (p. 2), constructing "him" as the one to defeat. Does this mean labor's struggle is not against women employers? Perhaps Muehlenkamp assumes women employers do not exist? Even more fundamental is the potential that he holds the belief that women are incapable of employer status. In constructing employers as male, Muehlenkamp once again reifies unionism patriarchy and alienates female participation in the labor movement. His discourse also directs attention away from the potential for struggle against female employers.

In addition to valuing patriarchy, Muehlenkamp's discourse also reveals the importance he attaches to "private ownership." Returning to his opening narrative about Eddie, he addresses his audience with the idea of "our union" as well as "Eddie's area," and "his area," "his [Eddie's] workers" (p. 1). So Muehlenkamp and his audience "own," as does "Eddie." Ownership is a central principle of capitalism. Capitalists "own" their workers. Ownership rationalizes the legitimacy of "owners who control" and "owned who are under control."

The idea of private ownership undermines the organizing model of unionism. The ideology of ownership facilitates difference. As I argued earlier in this essay, capitalism thrives on difference. Difference among union members, in terms of ownership, serves capitalist interests well. Those who "own" can excuse organizing failures, etc., on the "owned." Those who are "owned" can blame failure on those who "own." When unions struggle over intra-union ownership, members are diverted from their important struggles against capitalists.

Muehlenkamp further articulates difference in his identification of his audience. The teleconference was held nationally and viewing probably was open to all those who had occasion to participate. However, pragmatics suggest that only union officials were in a position to be involved. Not many rank-and-file members have the luxury, and indeed, would conceivably be allowed to participate in a two-day conference.

My question is: If the organizing model of unionism is posited as a framework through which all members may be equally participating members, then why address his speech to union officialdom? Muehlenkamp

appears not to notice anything contradictary. As he addresses his audience, I find that he constructs them as a part of his own group--a group of union elites. First of all, in a speech probably lasting no longer than ten to twelve minutes, Muehlenkamp refers to "we" eighty-two times; and to various forms of "they," "the workers," and "the members" sixty-one times. His opening lines quoted above contain the word "we" four times, and "the members" two times. He speaks of "our clear rights" being violated by employers (p. 5), as referring to **all** union members, but essentially he only pays lip service to this unity. His discourse is dominated by the theme of "**us**" for the "workers," speaking as if the workers are incapable of their own action. For instance, he depicts the fight against the employer as belonging to the union elite in the statement: "And when the boss does something that abuses workers to take away their rights, **we** [emphasis added] jump on it" (p. 3). His discourse further manifests an ideology of elitism in articulating the practices: "we identify leadership, we educate leadership" (p. 2); "we build and run the union...we identify every eligible worker...if we find someone who we think is weakening, we will visit that person at home" (p. 3).

Muehlenkamp also addresses the problem of a tripartite relationship among workers, employer, and **the union**. He argues that "we all know that there are only two parties: there are the bosses and there are workers" (p. 4). How ironic that in arguing against a tripartite system, he advocates one as well--them, them, and us; or the bosses, the workers, and us as union leaders. Muehlenkamp's discourse reifies what he set out to criticize and to speak against. Toward the middle of his speech, Muehlenkamp admits that "we see to it that every aspect of the [organizing] campaign--month after month--is carried through by the workers. If there is a press conference, the workers hold the press conference. If there is a need to visit churches, it is the workers who visit the churches and talk to ministers. If there is a presentation to the Central Labor Council, the workers come and make it. If there is a mass leafleting to be done, the workers carry out the task" (p. 3). Elitist? Yes. Democratically representative? No. Workers may carry out all the organizing activity, but it is the "elite" like Muehlenkamp who make sure that they do it.

Not only does Muehlenkamp's discourse facilitate elitism but also it reifies the legitimacy of organizational hierarchy. He refers to the rank-and-filer (p. 2), to the organizer (p. 1 and 2), to the office (p. 1), to the shop steward (p. 5), to union leaders (p. 5), and to union leadership (p. 5). He accepts all

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these as legitimate constituents of every successful union. But hierarchy breeds difference, and difference based on hierarchy destroys equality and unity. How ironic once again that unions do not exist apart from formal hierarchial designations. On the shop floor there are rank-and-file members, shop-stewards, grievance representatives, and members of the local leadership team (i.e. the traditional chapter president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, etc.). At the national level of each local are the same forms of hierarchial arrangement. And at the top (notice I say "top") is the AFL-CIO which is simply a larger reflection of the hierarchial patterns of the nationals and locals.

My question is why not continually question the integrity of hierarchy? Immediately I think of the argument that hierarchy is a necessary prerequisite to organizational purposes. But is it really all that necessary? Perhaps it is in capitalist models, but is it necessary to organized labor? What about socialist ideas, or at least notions of flattened levels of hierarchy? Hierarchy is an institutionalized form of American capitalist ideology. I also argue that Muehlenkamp is so indoctrinated with capitalist ideology that he, and most other union participants, cannot see his way beyond hierarchy. I leave the reader with one more question, "Why have elected union officers at all?" This process seems largely counterproductive if the idea is to engage every union member as an activist (mini-leader?) for organized labor.

The final ideological problem I would like to address, as it manifests itself in Muehlenkamp's speech, revolves around his identification of the "bosses" as the one and only "enemy" of labor. He argues that "we know we have to defeat him" (p. 2), "[w]e know the boss makes destroying the union his number one priority" (p. 2). Muehlenkamp asks his listeners, "Is any union 'safe' today with the boss?" (p. 5). He concludes by urging that "we must...[continue] building the union to fight the boss" (p.5). Two implications are important here. The first is that Muehlenkamp once again reifies elitism among union members. He refers to what "we," as an elite class of union officials know about the boss as enemy. In the process he constructs rank-and-file members as either unsuspecting objects or as objects to be pitied.

> We know that they [the bosses] will fire people, that they will make threats, that they will bribe lead workers and promote people out of the union. We know that they will threaten to close down if the union wins. We know that people who step forward and show courage will be isolated and slandered.

> We know that the bosses will set up fink committees and finance them. We know that the local news coverage in the town will be violently anti-union. That every employer and business organization in the community will be lined up against us. We know that no expense will be spared in delaying the NLRB election. We know that the workers will be subjected to endless, vicious, racist, divisive propaganda. (p. 2-3)

The second implication follows from the first one. Who really is the enemy? To whom is this "enemy" a threat to? A surface impression of Muehlenkamp's speech suggests bosses are the enemy of all union members. Close scrutiny of his discourse, however, suggests that Muehlenkamp really understands bosses as the enemy of himself and other union officials like him. Remember his philosophy that when bosses abuse workers, "we jump on it" (p. 3). Once again Muehlenkamp fosters difference among union members.

But what if the enemy is **not** capitalist bosses? Perhaps union members are their own worst enemy? Perhaps union ideology constructs bosses as the enemy in order to obscure labor's own struggle with "individualism" and "private careerism?" Casting the boss as "the enemy" diverts attention away from the origin of the business unionism struggle discussed at an earlier point in this paper. Both Samuel Gompers and Jim Mitchell, prominent historical union activist officials, began as rank-and-file members, made their way up, and engaged in private careers of business unionism. Were these men really so different from the typical American worker? Probably not, but they bought the American myth of individualism. I argue, that the prevalence of business unionism tendencies which Muehlenkamp argues against, are deeply rooted in a fundamental ideological contradiction within union ideology. Rank-and-file members can work their way up through hierarchial levels and attain positions of prominence. In fact, Muehlenkamp endorses such activity. He speaks of steward recruitment and the importance of union representation by select members (p. 5). Union members are given the option of going after higher levels of achievement in the union, a practice that I argue is counterproductive, but they also are kept "in their place." Unions, ideally, are to stand for the democratic representation of all worker voices, but members wanting to be heard must go through the "proper channels." A typical scenario is the following: First one goes to the shop steward/stewardess who then goes to a grievance representative. The grievance representative then goes to the grievance committee who will then file

complaints or suggestion with the proper officials, etc. The model of capitalist bureaucracy is very much in place within the structural make-up of American unions.

Conclusion

I have only looked at one speech made by one union official. I believe, however, that Muehlenkamp's speech is characteristic of union discourse and therefore, it is symptomatic of organized labor's larger problems. My critique and conclusions are preliminary in nature, but I argue from this analysis that the ideology of the American union plays an integral role in the decline of union membership and bargaining power. The contradictions and constraints inherent within union discourse keep laborers from successfully organizing as a significant and unified social force.

Those in the area of organizational communication need to pay much more attention to union discourse and to the ideological contradictions manifest within it. I have suggested a number of implications inviting future research. We need to problematize the patriarchal orientation of the labor movement, revealing the constraints and limits patriarchy invites. We need to expose the elitism dominating the discourse of union activists such as Muehlenkamp. We need to explore the problems inherent in accepting the unquestioned legitimacy of hierarchy in union structure. Above all, we need to reveal the dominance of American individualism in union discourse. We need to posit the idea to union members that they themselves are perhaps their own worst enemy. The beginning of the revitalization of the labor movement lies in exposing the ideological contradictions and concomitant constraints within union discourse. In exposing these ideological contradictions and constraints, we will provide the bases from which a new and non-contradictory discourse may be developed.

Endnotes

1. For an account of the non-violent tactics endorsed by current U.S. unions see: P. Wilayto and D. Cormier. (1990). "We won't go back!" The story of the United Mine Workers of America Against the Pittston Coal Company: Lessons from the labor movement. NY: United Labor Action.

2. In 1992 the average hourly wage of union members is approximately $13.02. The average non-union member receives the hourly wage of $10.78. The discrepancy is hardly one that warrants the accusation that organized activity destroys the employer's ability to avoid bankruptcy due to labor costs set by unions. (Source: 1992 Bureau of Labor Statistics)

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